

ADF MENTAL HEALTH & WELLBEING

SUICIDE



JOINT HEALTH COMMAND
VICE CHIEF OF THE DEFENCE FORCE



The one thing that will save a human life is a human relationship

Although suicide remains a relatively uncommon event, it is a tragic loss of life with devastating consequences for families, work mates/colleagues and the organisation in general.

Intervening with people who have thoughts of suicide or who have engaged in suicide related behaviour is possible. However, it does require a determined and focused commitment from all members of the ADF.

Suicide is a difficult subject but it is everyone's business.

What makes a person engage in suicidal behaviour(s)?

Everyone has different levels of tolerance to stress and pain and we all try to cope as best we can during significant and sometimes painful changes in our lives.

However, sometimes the burden of pain and suffering can be so great that an individual is overwhelmed to a point where he/she loses their usual effective coping ability. Suicide may be considered by an overwhelmed individual, however, these thoughts and feelings can be overcome with effective support and intervention.

What are the risk factors?

While there is no 'typical' profile for someone who may contemplate suicide, there are some common risk factors that we all need to be aware of in an effort to save lives. Some of these factors include, but are not limited to:

- significant losses (death of a loved one, pet, loss of a relationship)
- feelings of helplessness and hopelessness
- lack of current and accessible social supports that the person is willing to use
- mental health concerns
- past history of suicide related behaviour
- emotional pain that does not seem to have an end.

Do not joke about suicide

This will contribute to the stigma surrounding suicide and mental health and make it harder for an individual who is thinking about suicide to seek help. It is mandated in Defence policy that an individual's Commander must be notified if you witness any comment or gesture implying suicidal thoughts or behaviours. It is the responsibility of all Defence personnel to respond to the risk of suicide.

What should I look for?

Signs are simply those things that alert us to the possibility that someone may be thinking about suicide. If we see or hear signs, they are an opportunity for us to ask if the person is thinking of suicide. Asking does not increase the likelihood of suicide.

People can become very frightened if they see these signs, but it's vital to remember that signs may be an attempt by a person at risk of suicide to communicate that they are not coping and that they are overwhelmed by intense emotional pain. This pain is often associated with stressful events and/or loss.

Signs may appear as changes in a person's situation, their behaviour(s), physical state, thoughts, and/or emotions/feelings. These may include:

- talk or hints of suicidal behaviour
- preoccupation with death
- giving away possessions
- isolation or withdrawal
- increased alcohol and/or drug use
- lack of interest in hobbies or appearance.

Secure LIFE

L LOCATE HELP

I INFORM – chain of command

F FIND – someone to stay with the person

E EXPEDITE – get help immediately

Supervisor's Role

The supervisor's role in suicide prevention/ intervention is to:

- be suicide aware so that you can identify personnel at risk
- actively support suicide intervention efforts and recognise that suicide prevention/intervention requires effort from all members of the ADF
- be aware of the resources that can assist your people
- encourage attendance on suicide prevention training and at mandatory awareness presentations
- take all suicide related behaviour seriously
- enhance the development of 'esprit de corps' in the workplace by:
 - building a work unit culture that fosters both a sense of belonging and 'looking after your mates'
 - offering social support
 - developing a culture that encourages early intervention and supports those seeking help.

Where to seek help

In an emergency situation, call 000.

If you or someone you know has thoughts of suicide or has engaged in any form of suicide related behaviour, seek help immediately.

Contact your local on base Health Centre, Mental Health Professional, Chaplain or the Duty Officer/Officer of the Day. You do not have to deal with this alone.

The ADF Mental Health All-Hours Support Line (ASL) is a confidential telephone service for ADF members and their families available 24/7 on **1800 628 036** or if calling from overseas +61 2 9425 3878.

If you are away from base, or for out-of-hours assistance, you can call **1800 IMSICK** to locate the nearest support.

Chaplains are connected to all units in Australia and can provide support and appropriate referrals.

The ADF Health and Wellbeing Portal
www.defence.gov.au/health/healthportal/

The Portal is an online health information resource tool for all current and ex-serving ADF Members and their families.

Other Resources

You! Become suicide aware. For further information regarding the ADF suicide prevention training available in your local area please contact your local Medical Centre.

Defence Family Helpline (1800 624 608)

www.defence.gov.au/dco

The Defence Family Helpline is your first point of call for support, information and connection with your community. The Helpline is available 24/7 for ADF Members and their families, and is staffed by qualified human services professionals including social workers and psychologists.

You can also email the Helpline on DefenceFamilyHelpline@defence.gov.au and receive a response within 24 hours.

Veterans and Veterans Families Counselling Service (VWCS). This 24-hour service is available to veterans of all deployments and their families on **1800 011 046**.